



Smart Snacking in Washington Schools

The United States Department of Agriculture's Smart Snacks in School rules promote healthy eating by students by requiring all foods and drinks sold in schools to meet nutrition standards. These standards encourage whole grains, low-fat dairy products, fruits, vegetables, and leaner protein, and limit sugary drinks, chips, and candy. In 2014, with funding from the Washington State Department of Health's Community Transformation Grant and assistance from Washington's Action for Healthy Kids, several Washington schools made smart changes in the snacks they offered.

Freeman High School (Rockford, WA)

The Challenge

Freeman High School serves 300 students, 17 percent of whom qualify for free or reduced price meals, an indication of poverty. Youth living in poverty have less access to healthy food, placing them at risk for poor health and lower test scores (Taras H, Nutrition and Academic Performance, Journal of School Health, August 2005). In surrounding Spokane County, 75 percent of 10th and 12th graders eat less than five servings of fruits and vegetables a day, 10 percent drink two or more sodas daily, and 23 percent are overweight or obese (Healthy Youth Survey, 2012). Nutritious foods can reduce obesity and other risk factors for chronic disease, but students can choose nutritious foods only when they are both available and affordable.

Just three months before the Smart Snack standards went into effect, Freeman's Junior Class Store was nowhere near meeting the new rules. Past efforts to introduce healthy options had not been sustained. The challenge was to market and sell healthy options while still generating revenue. As Raeann Ducar, Nutrition Services Director, put it, "The Junior Class Store needs a makeover!"

The Solution: Engaged Students and Smart Sales Strategies

Ms. Ducar knew student participation would be critical. Under her guidance, students used the Alliance for a Healthier Generation's Product Calculator to identify new snack items that met the standards, and then organized taste-testing events. Students used grant funds to purchase attractive display racks and a banner. Ms. Ducar taught students about product placement, marketing, and pricing strategies (from the Smarter Lunchroom Movement, smarterlunchrooms.org). Using these strategies, students displayed healthier items at the front of the counter with signs to make them most visible, priced them lower than less-healthy options, and advertised the new and improved products through flyers, the school's TV broadcasts, daily announcements, and sampling events.

Student involvement in key decisions on products, pricing, and marketing created a strong sense of student buy-in. And when looking at their sales data, they found that store profits increased by \$120 per week. For these reasons, plus support from school administrators and the district's wellness committee, Ms. Ducar is confident the Junior Class Store will sustain the changes.

Project Lead: Raeann Ducar, RD, rducar@freemansd.org, Nutrition Services Director.

Zillah Middle School (Zillah, WA)

The Challenge

Zillah Middle School in rural Yakima County, Washington, serves 230 youth, with half qualifying for free or reduced price meals. In Yakima County, 77 percent of 10th and 12th graders eat less than five servings of fruits and vegetables a day, 14 percent drink two or more sodas daily, and 32 percent overweight or obese. PE/Health Teacher Todd Reed witnessed students consuming many energy drinks, chips, candy bars and other unhealthy foods every daily. The school had no student store.

The Solution: Marketing, Education, and Policy

Mr. Reed formed a team of staff, students, and parents to open a Smart Snacks school store, and students designed hallway and classroom posters to market it. Using Smart Snacks grant funds, Mr. Reed purchased granola bars, fruit snacks, chips, beverages and whole grain cookies, all of which met the Smart Snacks standards. He also dedicated class time to discussions about the changes. “The students responded positively, coming to the conclusion that you don’t have to sacrifice taste to be healthy,” said Mr. Reed. The student store is continuing in the 2014-15 school year, and the lessons from the store will influence the district’s wellness policy when it is updated the next year.

Project Lead: Todd Reed, reed_t@zsd.wednet.edu, Physical Education Instructor.

Richland School District (Richland, WA)

The Challenge

Richland School District serves 11,900 students, with a third qualifying for free or reduced price meals. In surrounding Benton County, 81 percent of 10th and 12th graders eat less than five servings of fruits and vegetables a day, 13 percent drink two or more sodas daily, and 25 percent are overweight or obese. In 2010, the district had overhauled its school meal program and a la carte food offerings to improve their nutrition quality. However, food sold in the student stores went unchanged and included less healthy offerings such as pizza and cup o’ soup. Since then, the district had lost a la carte customers and the resulting revenue. The Richland Nutrition Services Team was determined to get customers back by demonstrating that healthy can be tasty.

The Solution: Back-to-School Smart Snacking Events

At back-to-school events for the 2014-2015 school year, the team showcased new a la carte Smart Snacks in five large secondary schools, and offered free samples during lunchtime in each of the district’s three high schools. Students helped the team choose a la carte items by rating each food and beverage. Also, lunchrooms featured interactive food and beverage displays to demonstrate why smart snacks are important for health and well-being, and to give students opportunities to provide feedback.

Project Lead: Audrey Wickman, Audrey.Wickman@rsd.edu, Assistant Director of Nutrition Services.

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